Equal Rights

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BIENNIAL CONVENTION NATIONAL WOMAN'S PARTY

Excerpts From Speeches

Mary Murray, railroad worker and Chairman of the National Industrial Council, presiding at the Women in Industry luncheon at the Hotel Roosevelt, New York City, on November 15, explained the needs and demands of working women. "We working women," she said, "are particularly interested in industrial equality; the right of a woman to work on the same terms as a man.

"As a railroad worker, I, together with many women here today, was thrown out of work by the passage of the no-night work law for women in New York. Thousands of New York women lost their jobs because of that law; printers, linotype operators, proof-readers, writers and reporters in newspaper offices, elevator operators (except in hotels), restaurant workers, pharmacists, women in drug stores and ice cream parlors and women messengers. All of us can speak from bitter experience of the harm done women workers through special restrictive laws which do not apply to male workers in industry. Today women workers in this country as well as throughout the world are standing with their backs to the wall, facing a drive to send women out of the field of paid employment and back to the home.

The National Woman's Party for years has been blazing the trail leading toward complete equality for women in the laws of our country. We are a non-partisan organization open to any woman who believes in equal rights for men and women. In our Industrial Council we have both union and non-union women. The Party is not in favor of long hours or low wages for either men or women. It takes no stand on whether or not legislation is the best method to bring about shorter working hours and higher wages. However, it does demand that if legislation is considered necessary, it should apply to all workers and not to women alone. It objects to having adult women placed in a class apart in industry; an inferior class, linked with children in legislation."

No Compromise

Benjamin H. Namm, President of the Namm Store, Brooklyn, declared that he believes in the principle for which the Woman's Party stands—equal rights for women under the law and in all human relationships. "It does," he said, "seem high time that we all got together; the women and the men and the employers and the employees. I am sure that your organization realizes it, but I doubt if the great majority do. You women have a tremendous power; 50% of the voting power and 85% of the total purchasing power. It stands to reason that, properly motivated, women can be a force for the greatest possible good in this country. Without a plan and without a program, neither they nor the employers or the employees of the country are going to get anywhere."

In regard to minimum wage and hour legislation, Mr. Namm made it clear that he believed they should be based upon the job rather than on the sex of the worker. However, he confessed, he would be willing to compromise and accept minimum wage and hour legislation for women if nothing more could be obtained.

In a friendly but firm manner, Mary Murray reiterated the stand of the Woman's Party; that there could be no compromise on this issue. "I want Mr. Namm to know," she said, "that many, many thousands of women workers have been thrown out of employment because of their restriction on the hours; from candy and drug stores, ice-cream parlors, women elevator operators, and almost 3,000 railroad workers on the BMT, IRT and Queens lines, simply because the law said they could not work overtime and a man could. And the man of course got the job. So there is a discrimination, a serious one, against women. We women cannot compromise.

"It also affected our women in the printing trades, and among those women were widows with dependents, women with an invalid son or daughter and women with good-for-nothing husbands; deprived of work and means of livelihood on the ground of protecting their health and morals.

The National Woman's Party will never compromise."

Hardships of "Protective" Legislation

The hardships faced by women, because of so-called protective legislation, were recounted by Mollie Maloney, President of Bindery Women's Union Local No. 66, International Brotherhood of Book Binders. "Back in 1913," she said, "there was enacted and signed by the Governor and placed on the statute books of New York State, a law prohibiting women from working before 6 a. m. and after 10 p. m. That law worked a terrible hardship on the women in the bookbinding industry. At that time there were sev-

eral plants in New York, operating on a three-shift schedule,—a day-shift, an afternoon-shift, and a night-shift. On the two night shifts, the women worked shorter hours and received higher pay. On those same night shifts, there were employed many widows, women with sick husbands, and women with delinquent husbands, many with children and dependents.

"Down through the years have been added to that law, other vicious and more devastating laws. We women in the book-binding industry have suffered physically and mentally for the so-called welfare legislation for women only. We suffered physically because our hours were reduced by law so that we could not earn adequate wages to furnish us with proper food, clothing, and housing. Mentally, because in our midst we have a number of ambitious women who know they can never advance to executive positions, through those laws. Prior to 25 or 30 years ago, the head executive in every bindery was a woman, and many well-paid mechanical jobs were held by women. The employer, realizing he cannot give a woman an hour or two overtime work at night to finish a job, gives the opportunity to her male competitor. Hence the ambitious, clever woman has to sit back and look on while somebody who has no right to her job is working at it.

Laws Against Women

"Women in the Book-binding Union, Local No. 66, oppose all legislation made for women only on the ground that welfare laws made for women are laws against women and legislate them out of their jobs. We also oppose all minimum wage, as a minimum wage often becomes a maximum wage. And if an employer is told he has to pay a woman a certain wage, he gives the job to men and boys who do the job cheaper. Through those laws, men and boys get the experience at night; and now they are working in the day-time and sometimes far below the woman's scale.

A Fair Deal and No Favor

"The only bright side is that the National Woman's Party will place on the statute books of the United States the Equal Rights Amendment, which will give woman the right to take her place in the market-place with her brother. All we ask is a fair deal and no favor."

Yyonne Desaulniers, a member of Typographical Union Local No. 6, presented the case for women printers. She said: "I have been working at the printing trade 20 years, I am now working at the printing trade. From the passage of the nine-hour law—which also prohibited night work for women — women printers have been handicapped from working at this trade—overtime, time and a half, and even triple time, and night shifts, which pay more than day shifts, are all closed to women.

"After a long and expensive fight, women printers won a decision exempting women from night-work restriction. Most women are a little uncertain about what their rights are. A proof-reader can work nights on a newspaper, but she cannot work in a magazine shop and she cannot work in a commercial plant at night. No foreman seems to know exactly what the law is and he doesn't bother to find out so long as he can find a man to do the work.

"The union wages vary for newspaper and book shops and magazine shops according to day and night shifts. The scale is from $56 to $61 a week for a week of 37 to 44 hours. The night shifts pay a little more and the newspaper work pays more than the magazine and book and commercial work. You can see readily that in the commercial trades, the women are deprived by the New York labor law, of work opportunities because they cannot work nights, as proof-readers particularly. When you realize the advantages that are derived from a well-paying trade like this one, you can see how women are discriminated against by these labor laws which we have in the State."

A Plea for the Amendment

A plea for the Equal Rights Amendment to protect women from so-called protective legislation was voiced by Helen Elizabeth Brown, Chairman of the Workmen's Compensation Board of the State Roads Commission, Maryland. "It seems almost incredible," she said, "that we should be gathered here for the purpose of attaining industrial equality for women. You would think that the plain, direct, simple language of the Constitution of the United States would convey to anybody of ordinary intelligence that the citizens of the United States should enjoy as their birthright, equal opportunity and equal protection of the law. But that is not the case. Warped decisions in some of our courts have even excluded women from the meaning of the word "citizen," and in other cases, have even excluded them from the meaning of the word "person." We will continue to have that philosophy with us until we put an amendment in the United States Constitution that will not leave room for any arguments and that will not permit the imposition of any such discriminations. . . .

"The fundamental rights of women; industrial and other rights as human beings; should not be left to the whims and the fancies and the general incompetence of the average State legislator. What they win at one session is swept away at the next, and that thing has been going on at too great a cost to women in time, money, energy, and liberty.

"These rights of women and their other fundamental human rights can only be protected by the immediate passage of the Equal Rights Amendment."

EQUAL RIGHTS

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Minimum Wage

Helen Robbins Bitterman, Chairman of the Ohio Branch:

"I feel that the most important problem confronting us today is that of minimum wage laws, because it is the attitude of protectivism which stands between us in this country and the Equal Rights Amendment. It is the people who advocate protective legislation for women only who stand between us and the Equal Rights Amendment. Sane minimum wage legislation in this country has been blocked by two obstacles—sentimentality and the Constitution of the United States.

Prior to the Adkins decision of 1923, the Supreme Court had ruled that minimum wage legislation for men was an infringement of their right to contract. In England and Australia, both men and women had been placed under minimum wage legislation at the turn of the century. In this country it was necessary for proponents of that legislation to place their emphasis on laws for women only, which were based on sentimental chivalry and fear of prostitution. . .

"In the past 35 years, tremendous changes have taken place in industry. The status of the working woman more closely approximates that of the working man. There is little reason to create a special labor class for women. This is a change which proponents of protective legislation for women only have steadfastly refused to recognize.

"One of the things which has been very unfortunate about minimum wage legislation for women in this country is that it has gotten tied up with a very sentimental notion of a living wage, with the result that the minimum wage law in Ohio and everywhere else in this country has not been a true minimum wage—it has been so high it has become a maximum wage. It means that when you force women to work for $16 a week when an employer can only afford $14, that is the maximum that can be paid. It doesn't mean that minimum wage legislation as such is bad, but if you set the wage so high, it is maximum wage legislation. . .

"With six other misguided States, Ohio passed minimum wage laws for women in 1933, affecting the laundry and dry-cleaning industries. The laundry wage in Ohio was set at 27½c an hour—2½c more than the NRA wage for men and women. In the laundry industry, the women sort the clothes and do the skilled hand-finishing. The hand-finishers were being paid 35c an hour before the minimum was set. In several cases, that wage was reduced to 27½c. There was very little substitution of men for women—because they couldn't train the men to iron. However, there has been increasing tendency to supplant women with machinery. I would like to point out that women in the power hand laundries have been decreasing in numbers over 20 years. The minimum wage law accentuated but did not change the trend.

"If you take the dry-cleaning situation, that is a different story. Men have been increasing since 1910 in a large percentage. Women in the dry-cleaning industry do unskilled labor entirely—take in the garments, measure them before and after, do the spotting under the supervision of skilled operators. There is no work in dry-cleaning which can be done by women that cannot be done by men. The NRA wage was 27½c in small towns, 30c in towns the size of Akron, 33c in Cleveland. The minimum wage for women was set at 35c—unskilled work. We have discovered that 14.35 per cent of the 1,531 employed in the industry on June 30, 1933, before the law went into effect, were dismissed by July 1, 1936. That change took place mostly between February, 1936, and July 1, 1936. The industry had been getting very much better—business was up 60 per cent, some employers told me. My figures are based on 51 firms in 48 cities in Ohio employing over half of the women."

Jane Norman Smith, Chairman of the Committee on Equality of Economic Opportunity:

"The agitation in behalf of the New York minimum-wage law centered on starvation wages paid in canneries and the garment trades. The Governor of the State said the law must go into effect at once. It was *five* months after the law was passed before the first wage order was issued, and then it was applied to laundries and not to women in canneries and garment trades. Eight months after the passage of the law, a leading New York newspaper said, 'Starvation wages are still here and there is no relief in the canneries and garment trades. Those laundries forced to comply with the law have taken $3 a week from the pay envelope of the men to give the increase to the women.'

"In this day there is no human being who is intelligent and who has generosity of soul who does not want regulation of sweated industries. It seems to us in the National Woman's Party that the way to end the sweatshops is not through regulating the labor of women alone, but of men, too, because they must suffer in sweatshops just as much as the women.

"The National Woman's Party claims that no proof exists as to the benefits of these laws. About this time last year, the head of the Regional Labor Board in New York, in speaking before the Consumers' League, urged them to call a halt to the further enactment of labor legislation for women, because the laws already on the books cannot be enforced; that there are 1,080,000 who should be covered and only 80,000 women had been covered.

"Not in a single State having wage-and-hour legislation for women has it been possible to enforce the law. How, then, can these laws be proved beneficial? Wherever it has been enforced, women have been thrown out of employment in large numbers and replaced by men and boys working for a wage lower than the minimum enforced for women.

"On every side industrial equality for women is being attacked, in the States, nationally and internationally. The only way we can work successfully is to see that the Equal Rights Amendment is put into the Constitution of the United States before some other Amendment gets in which will

be an opening wedge for further discriminations against women."

Hon. Thomas Desmond, New York State Senator:

"If any legislation regarding minimum wages is to be enacted, that legislation, in addition to women and minors, should include men.

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"Minimum wage legislation for women only is a detriment and a handicap, an open invitation for the displacement of women employees by men. If the minimum wage is to be part of our social system, if it is needed to maintain our wage scales and to stabilize our industries, then, to forestall discrimination, to have it held constitutional, and to protect all workers against the unprincipled employer, that minimum wage law should also include men.

* * * * * * *

"Please permit me to say also that I am heartily in favor of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Equal Rights Amendment is a necessary corollary and supplement of equal suffrage, and its adoption will be the crowning act that will bring women to a status of the complete emancipation to which they are entitled by all the rules of right and justice."

RESOLUTIONS HONOR FORMER LEADERS

The following resolutions were adopted by the Convention:

Eunice Dana Brannan

WHEREAS Eunice Dana Brannan, an able and devoted leader in the Suffrage and Equal Rights movement, died November 14, 1936, and,

WHEREAS her work in the feminist movement was an inspiration to her colleagues in the National Woman's Party,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the National Woman's Party in Convention assembled, November, 1936, that we express the loss the organization has sustained in her passing, and that we resolve to carry on the cause dearest to her heart until equality for women, under law, and in the economic world is won.

Margaret M. Fotheringham

RESOLVED by the National Woman's Party in Convention assembled, November, 1936, that deep regret be expressed as to the passing in April of this year of Mrs. R. M. (Margaret M.) Fotheringham, of Buffalo, N. Y., a faithful and conscientious worker in the National Woman's Party for many years.

THE KEY OF OCCOQUAN

The heavy brass key of Occoquan, the old District of Columbia Woman's Prison, was presented to Florence Bayard Hilles, the retiring Chairman of the Woman's Party, by Mrs. Karl Greene, of New Mexico, at the Sunday luncheon of the Biennial Convention, November 15. A former matron of the prison gave the key to Mrs. E. A. Bocock, wife of the superintendent of Gallinger Hospital, which is now on the site of the old jail, and she, wishing it to be preserved with the historical records of the struggle for woman suffrage, turned it over to the Woman's Party through Mrs. Greene.

In accepting the key for the Woman's Party, Mrs. Hilles recalled the day when the White House pickets were arrested for "obstructing a sidewalk sixty feet wide" and were sentenced to sixty days in the workhouse. "There was not a key made to be turned on us," she continued, "that would stop the movement for freedom and liberty. This key of what has been the Bastile for American women will have a place in our Headquarters. It belongs not to the National Woman's Party but to all women who believe in freedom and equality for women."

IMPORTANT NEW PAMPHLET

A 249-page pamphlet, *A Comparison of the Political and Civil Rights of Men and Women in the United States*, compiled by Dr. Emma Wold, has been issued by the Inter-American Commission of Women, through the Government Printing Office. Orders for this pamphlet may be sent to Alma Lutz, Literature Chairman, 22 River Street, Boston, Massachusetts, or to Alva Belmont House. The sale price is 20c a copy and $15 a hundred.

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